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ABSTRACT

The idea of educational vouchers goes back to Adam Smith in 1778, according to this examination of past and present discussions about vouchers. The author begins by defining educational vouchers and summarizing the idea's history, especially since its revival in 1955 by economist Milton Friedman. Seven models of voucher systems are briefly outlined. One of the models, Christopher Jencks' regulated compensatory system, is described in detail and the results of its testing in the Alum Rock (California) Union Elementary School District are discussed. The author then reviews the arguments for and against vouchers. Supporters, he notes, claim that vouchers would promote social and economic equality, healthy competition among schools, accountability to parents, lesser financial pressures on nonpublic schools, and other benefits. Opponents' arguments, says the author, deal with social inequality, relationships between religion and public education, the appropriateness of the market analogy to education, and economic and administrative problems. The author points out the implications of regulated and unregulated voucher systems for the governance, funding, and delivery of education and concludes by reviewing the alternatives to vouchers available both generally and specifically in Alberta (Canada). (RW)

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EDUCATION VOUCHERS:

BOON OR BANE?

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July, 1981

EA 014 458

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INTRODUCTION: A SOCIAL CONTEXT FOR CHANGE IN EDUCATION

Alvin Toffler has suggested in The Third Wave (1980) that massive social changes are in progress. The Third Wave will swamp the social processes and the industrial mentality fostered by the previous second wave, the Industrial Revolution. Whether or not one agrees with Toffler, elsewhere there are echoes of his thinking and evidence of questioning of extant social structures.

Education can serve as an illustration. MacIver (1979:13), in a discussion of the OECD Report on Canadian Education (1976), notes that the Report attacks the most fundamental assumptions of the Canadian public school system. The Report (and MacIver concurs) charges that:

> ... Canadian education is organized along industrial lines and that this organization is for the purpose of achieving academic goals. The personnel of the schools are steeped in the university tradition and this reveals itself in the highly academic orientation of the schools. What is questioned here is the mode of organization of the public schools and especially the emphasis on the academic tradition.
>
> Virtually all students are required to pursue a course of studies that reveals this academic dominance. This results in a large proportion of students finding the schools irrelevant to their career choices. The comparatively small percentage of students who go on to university benefit from the experience, but besides becoming more academic they tend to become more docile and submissive. The academic style of the schools is continued through university and the habits gained in 12-16 years of study develop an approach to life that tends to discourage action. As so many people in responsible positions have internalized these habits and attitudes, society is burdened by many irrelevant academic procedures (Royal Commissions, studies, reviews, etc.).
>
> If this critique is valid it raises many questions about the school system, but these are questions that challenge the organization and aims of contemporary education. The major criticism here has been aimed at the "over academization" of the schools and the influence that this appears to have on society. It is necessary to consider approaches to education that develop more pragmatic modes of thought and which pursue more active life styles. An educational system that adopts different approaches to the industrial and business world and which considers the problem of leisure and unemployment as critical issues is clearly needed.

As well, Cohen and Farrar (1977:92), in a discussion of education vouchers which they refer to as the enfant terrible of recent school reforms, conclude that a number of educational dilemmas result from the means by which industrialization was advanced:

> ... It results more from a social division of labor that encourages the specialization of work, the professionalization of roles, and the partitioning of authority. In advanced industrial societies this solidifies professional power in education, as well as discouraging active parental involvement. Parents used to have more to do with education simply because there often was not much formal schooling available. It was not uncommon in the 18th and early 19th centuries for children to get much of their education from a parent-- or from a job, in church, in an apprenticeship, or in other informal settings.
>
> With the rise of schooling, education increasingly became the province of trained specialists. Professionals gain economic returns, social satisfaction, personal status, individual identity, and group power from their roles. And parents, most of whom have occupations providing similar rewards, have seen their educational role narrowed and redefined. It still involves early childhood education and help with homework in the elementary grades, but increasingly centers on insuring that children receive the right professional attention.
>
> The growth of this division of labour had political consequences. In the early and middle 19th century, when public schools began, teachers had little status and less power therefore they were at the mercies of their communities. But the growth of a complex industrial division of labor weakened the bonds connecting work, family, school, and the community and eroded the forces that kept teachers in a subordinate and dependent position. Gradually, teaching--like many other occupations-- has gained social definition, autonomy, and political power; community power over schools has correspondingly attenuated.

Thus, education reflects a larger social milieu. Education, as with other social institutions, appears to have become institutionalized and professionalized.

However, within education, one of the by-products of social evolution is a slowly growing reaction to the institutionalized, professionalized concepts of education. For example, although the idea of community control in public education has been criticized as unworkable by some educational professionals and social scientists, it is re-emerging through parent action as a possible

alternative to bureaucratic and professional control. Jennings (1979:74) quoting James Guthrie, notes that:

> ... Citizen dissatisfaction with the schools, fueled by rapidly rising school costs and declining student achievement test scores during the last decade, has catalyzed a contemporary campaign to establish a new balance between lay and professional control. This contemporary effort ... derives its energy from a large and diverse political circle, including fiscal conservatives, ethnic and racial minorities, alienated and anti-bureaucratic liberals, disappointed parents and frustrated citizens.

Whether you believe Toffler, consider the flow of social evolution, or examine trends in education, the message appears the same. Change is inevitable. Changes in education are inevitable. Alternatives to education and schooling as we know them will occur. We should prepare ourselves for the most desirable educational future by studying the potential alternatives and their possible consequences.

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

One possible alternative to existing education processes is the concept of the education voucher. The purpose of this paper is to define the concept, outline its history, identify models, summarize the arguments for and against the voucher plans, present implications, and outline possible alternatives.

EDUCATION VOUCHERS: THE BASIC CONCEPT

Warren (1974:1) defines voucher education as:

> ... a method for financing education by giving to parents vouchers of a pre-determined value, which they give to the school where they choose to send their children. The school then redeems the voucher for cash.

Bridge (1974:2) amplifies the concept by providing a view of the basic rationale behind the scheme:

> ... The basic idea of education vouchers is simply that school districts provide parents with direct grants of money to implement their choices among schooling alternatives; with these vouchers, they may buy their way into any school that will have them. In theory, providing parents with direct money grants to buy schooling, sets in motion a complex causal chain which results in improved student performance and increased parental satisfaction. Figure 1 summarizes this causal sequence.
>
> Supposedly, vouchers will cause a broader range of schools to enter the educational marketplace, and because parents will have direct control over school purse strings, teachers and administrators will be more responsive to parents' wishes and children's needs. This will somehow lead to instructional innovation which will result in improved student performance and increased parental satisfaction. What these educational innovations might be is anyone's guess; however, most people seem to think that it is more a matter of faithfully applying the teaching technology that we have, not the development of magic new systems. Stated quite harshly, vouchers operate on the premise that students will perform better if schools try harder, and schools will try harder if they are directly accountable to parents who have a big financial stick with which to exact performance. The voucher scheme is merely a means for distributing the financial sticks to parents.

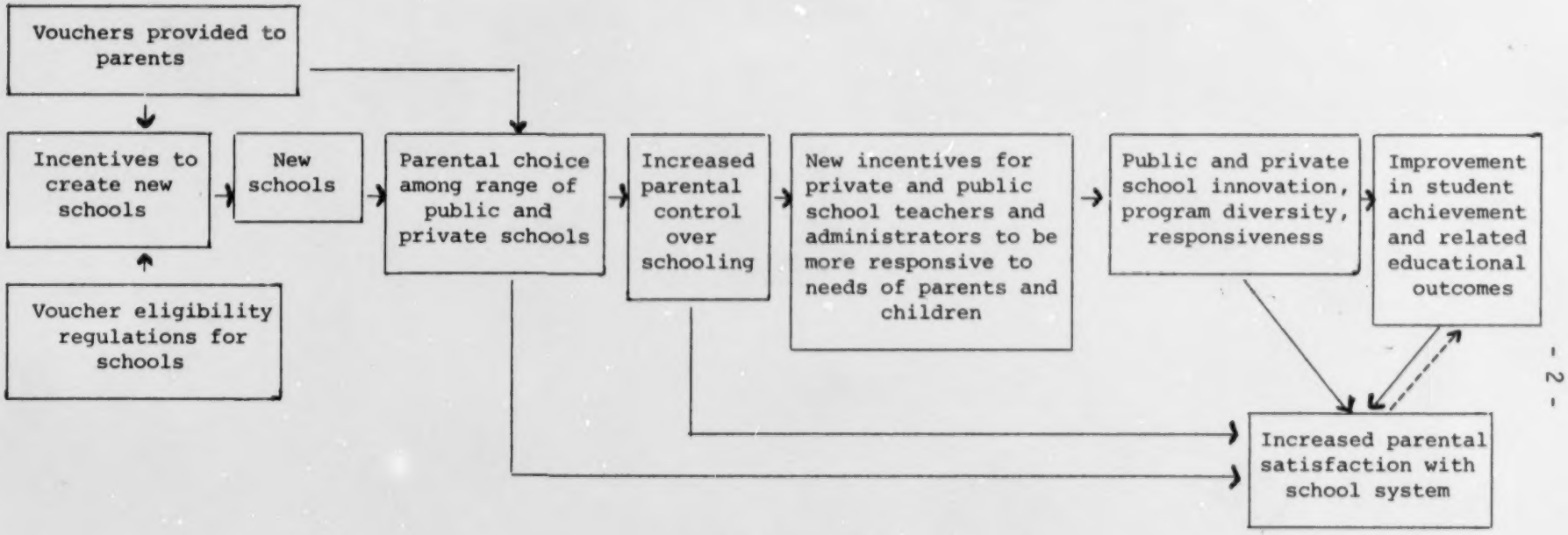
Vouchers provided to parents
Incentives to create new schools
New schools
Parental choice among range of public and private schools
Increased parental control over schooling
New incentives for private and public school teachers and administrators to be more responsive to needs of parents and children
Public and private school innovation, program diversity, responsiveness
Improvement in student achievement and related educational outcomes
Voucher eligibility regulations for schools
Increased parental satisfaction with school system

FIG. 1 - Model of assumed cause and effect relationships in an education voucher system. (Rand, 1972:6)

In historical terms, Warren (1974:1) notes that:

> ... The use of vouchers as a means of financing education is hardly new. Adam Smith, in 1778, suggested that parents be responsible for the salary of the local schoolmaster, if they were satisfied with his performance. Tom Paine worked out a plan for tax rebates to educate the children of parents too poor to pay. Almost a century later, John Stuart Mill, worried about government control of curriculum, suggested that the best way for the state to fulfill its obligation to educate the public was to hold all parents legally responsible for the education of their own children, underwriting the expenses of those who could not afford to pay.
>
> These notions of voucher education did not command great public attention until the late 1960's.

Overlan (1975:37-39) outlines the major trends of the voucher saga beginning in 1955:

> ... It was not until about 1955 that this idea (education vouchers) was revived -- this time by Milton Friedman, the well-known University of Chicago economist. While conceding the desirability of having the government finance education, Friedman saw little or no merit in having the government manage a monopolistic public school system. He suggested instead that American schools be "denationalized" and that classical market-place theory be applied to them.
>
> Friedman's is a relatively unregulated voucher system. Under his proposal, the government's role in education would be limited to financing and "to insuring that the schools meet certain minimum standards, such as it now inspects restaurants to insure that they maintain minimum sanitary standards." Friedman would allow schools to set their own admissions standards, so long as they did not offend against the freedom of others. He cautions, for example, that no schools should be allowed to discriminate against racial minorities in their admissions standards. He would permit parents to add to the basic value of the voucher as issued by the government. Parents would be able to buy a more expensive education for their children, depending on their interests and ability to pay--so long as the government paid for a basic education for all.
>
> This voucher idea--that parents should have free educational choice and the money to back up that choice--was picked up and elaborated upon by a number of other scholars in the middle and late 1960's. Some of them--Harvard's Christopher Jencks, for example--proposed essentially the same voucher idea, but argued that there should be considerably more government regulation. He argued that no parent should be allowed to supplement the government voucher with his own private resources. He

also suggested that children from poor families should receive a special compensatory voucher geared to making these children more attractive to schools in a free market for competition and geared to making resources available to solving some of the challenging educational problems that some children bring to schools.

At about the same time, Theodore Sizer -- then dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, now headmaster of Phillips Academy -- hatched a specialized voucher plan that he called "A Proposal for a Poor Children's Bill of Rights." Here government coupons or vouchers would be given only to poor children, with a sliding scale so that the government subsidy would decrease as family income rose.

Meanwhile, at the University of California at Berkeley, John Coons and Stephen Sugarman joined the academic voucher debate. They proposed quite a different kind of system but one that was true to the fundamental principles of parent freedom of choice and government financing of that choice. Their plan, called the "family power equalizing voucher," is complex and difficult to summarize. Quite simply, it would permit parents not only to send their child to a school of their choice but also to support different levels of educational expenditure based on interest yet sensitive to each family's ability of pay. This thumbnail sketch of variations on the voucher theme is not meant to show how various scholars who share a basic sympathy about family choice and government money to back up that choice can still squabble about details. Rather, it suggests how different people can come at the issue from quite different perspectives. Some voucher supporters for example, see vouchers as a way of applying classical free-market theory of supply and demand to schooling. They are generally conservative economically and politically--a group that would have been called "libertarian" or even "liberal" in the nineteenth century. Their code words include "competition" and "greater efficiency." They insist on the need to reduce the role of the state in education.

At the same time there are voucher supporters who spring from quite a different neighborhood of ideas. These are the present-day liberals who emphasize the instructional reform that vouchers might bring about. They include those advocates of free and freedom schools who think that these reforms deserve government support. But these voucher supporters do not emphasize liberty of individual so much as equality of choice. Their chief code words are "diversity," "options," and "equality of opportunity." In their vision, the poor and racial minorities should have exactly the same kinds of choices as the rich and the white. They are committed to individual choice but see the need for extensive government intervention to see that this choice is guaranteed to the less fortunate. They would even countenance limiting any choice based on private privilege to make the choice to the poor truly equal.

... The federal government stepped into the middle of this mostly academic debate in 1969. At that time, the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity gave a grant to Christopher Jencks and a number of his associates at a private, non-profit research organization in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Center for the Study of Public Policy. Given OEO's primary interest in educational reform for poor children, it is little wonder that it should turn to Jencks, whose interest in vouchers displayed a deep commitment to equality of educational opportunity and to giving the poor greater educational choice and control. And it is little wonder that, with the grant from OEO to develop a detailed voucher plan to be tested in a number of school districts across the nation, Jencks should develop a plan that met OEO's primary concern for the poor.

The result of this grant was an extremely detailed research proposal called the "regulated compensatory voucher plan." Previously, scholars had merely sketched out the voucher notion; Jencks and his colleagues developed a very specific and testable plan of action research.

In this plan the government voucher would be considered as full payment of tuition at any private or public school. Parents would not be able to supplement the voucher with out-of-pocket payments. And poor children would receive a higher-dollar-value voucher from the government. In addition, all voucher schools would have to accept uniform standards of suspension and expulsion of students and make available to parents a wide variety of information about facilities, teachers, instructional programs, and students. In a similar vein, the regulated compensatory voucher would require a guarantee of open admissions. For example, should any voucher school have more applicants than places, it would have to fill at least half of these places by picking applicants randomly and fill other places in such a way as not to discriminate against ethnic minorities.

The Center for the Study of Public Policy recommended not only a detailed voucher plan but also a research strategy for testing it. Four or five demonstration programs were to be launched in heterogeneous communities. Because of OEO's and the Center's special concern for the "disadvantaged," these demonstration communities would have to have a large number of students from poor families and minority groups. The demonstrations were to last five to eight years. As a first step, eligible communities were to receive study grants from OEO so that they could argue out the merits of the voucher case and adapt the general outlines of the regulated compensatory voucher plan to fit local conditions.

... Between 1969 and 1973 six school districts were awarded OEO grants to study whether they would want to proceed to a full-scale demonstration of the voucher idea: Alum Rock, in San Jose, California; Gary, Indiana; New Rochelle, New York; Rochester, New York; San Francisco, California; and Seattle, Washington. Only one decided to make the leap--the relatively unknown and underfinanced school district of Alum Rock, which began its voucher test in September 1972.

Probably because it was the first of its kind, Alum Rock was allowed to make very serious compromises on the basic voucher notion. For example, the project began by involving only six of Alum Rock's sixteen elementary schools. An even more critical compromise was related to private school involvement in the test. Because of a restrictive state constitution, nonpublic schools were not permitted to use vouchers.

Thus Alum Rock is a test of greater parent choice and of greater diversity among schools, but only public schools can participate. This is an improvement over the status quo, but it is a long way from the kind of vouchers that most people believe deserve a test--the kind that can also be cashed by private schools. And though Alum Rock is an extremely restricted test of the voucher idea, it still has its value. From Alum Rock we are getting the answers to some important questions about the probable workings of more generous voucher plans.

VARIATIONS ON THE THEME: VOUCHER MODELS

The Center for the Study of Public Policy (1970:20) systematically examined seven different education voucher models. Each of the seven models can be described briefly and, in some instances, the names of those persons most closely associated with the particular voucher concept can be appended.

1. The Friedman - Unregulated Market Model. Households would be issued vouchers with the same redeemable value for each child at any school or institution of parental choice. All schools (public, private and parochial) could charge tuition to the amount of the voucher. The amount of the voucher per child would initially be legislated at a level equal to the existing level of expenditure in public schools.

2. The Sizer-Whitten - Unregulated Compensatory Model. The value of the voucher would be higher for poor children. Schools are permitted to charge whatever additional tuition they wish. Families with incomes above the national average would receive no subsidy. The value of the voucher would decline to zero as the family income approached some defined level.

3. The Compulsory Private Scholarship Model. The schools could charge as much tuition as they liked, provided they gave scholarships to those children unable to pay full tuition. Eligibility and size of scholarships were to be determined by the Education Voucher Agency which would establish a formula showing how much families with certain incomes could be charged.

4. The Coons-Sugarman Effort Voucher Model. This model established several different possible levels of per pupil expenditure and allowed a school to choose its own level. Parents who chose high expenditure schools would be charged more tuition (or tax) than parents who chose low expenditure schools. Tuition (or tax) also would be related to income. In this manner, the "effort" demanded of a low-income family attending a high expenditure school would be the same as the "effort" demanded of a high income family in the same school.

5. The "Egalitarian" Model. The value of the voucher would be the same for each child. No school would be permitted to charge any additional tuition. Schools could solicit money for special programs from government agencies, foundations, or industry. Voucher increases could be lobbied. Community school committees would be encouraged.

6. The Achievement Model. The value of the voucher would be based on the progress made by the child during the year. Schools could be rewarded when students exceeded predicted levels and penalized when students fell below predicted levels. Schools might contract achievement levels where monies were proportional to gains on standard tests.

7. The Jenck's - Regulated Compensatory Model. Schools could not charge tuition beyond the value of the voucher. They could "earn" extra funds by

accepting children from poor families or educationally disadvantaged children. A variant of this model permits privately managed voucher schools to charge affluent families according to their ability to pay.

Of these models, only Jenck's Regulated-Compensatory Model has come close to being field tested and, as such, deserves a closer examination.

THE JENCK'S REGULATED-COMPENSATORY EDUCATION VOUCHER SYSTEM

Operationalizing the Model

The Basic Model. The Center for the Study of Public Policy (1970) noted that education vouchers in their simplest forms:

> ... would provide financial support to parents which they could use to purchase schooling for their children. Instead of public education funds being given directly to school boards or schools, the funds would be divided into a fair share for every school child. Parents would receive a voucher which would enable them to pay for their child's education at the school of their choice--be it public or private. A local voucher agency would cash the vouchers which parents signed over to the particular schools.

Basic Regulated-Compensatory Variables. The Center for the Study of Public Policy (1970) further noted the "ground rules" of a basic voucher system:

> ... 1) No school should be able to charge parents tuition in addition to the voucher amount. This would prevent discrimination against the children of poor families who could not afford such extra tuition charges.
>
> 2) In order to give all students an unbiased chance for admission to schools of their choice, participating schools with more places than applicants would enroll all applicants. Schools with more applicants than places would accept a portion of their students, say half, by their own criteria and the other half randomly.
>
> 3) All participating schools should provide parents with enough information (e.g. class size, facilities provided, etc.) to enable parents to make an informed choice among schools for their children.

Extra money should be given to schools which enroll poor children. This is intended to provide an incentive to schools which enroll large numbers of poor children.

Racial discrimination would be forbidden in voucher schools. Vouchers could be used at parochial schools without violating church-state provisions because: (1) parents, not the government, would choose where to spend the voucher funds, or (2) voucher funds could be limited to secular education expenses.

A Basic Delivery System. The following "minimum requirement" regulated-compensatory voucher model was detailed by Warren (1974: 6 - 12) as a preliminary to the New Jersey consideration of the implementation of the voucher concept.

The EVA

The first step in beginning a voucher program would be the establishment of the central administrative unit - the Education Voucher Agency. The responsibilities of the EVA would fall into six major categories:

a) general administration
b) establishing school eligibility
c) collecting and disseminating information to parents
d) technical assistance
e) districting and transporting
f) accountability

a) general administration

The range of activities which can be classified as general administration might include: collecting federal, state and local funds with which to pay for the vouchers; setting the value of the basic voucher grant; disbursing funds to schools; managing transportation systems; determining the standard for the compensatory grant; and the dollar value of that grant; and any other general administrative duties not covered in any other part of the administration.

b) establishing school eligibility

It is this part of the Education Voucher Agency's responsibilities which pertain to determining what kinds of admissions procedures are acceptable in the eligible schools, and whether or not schools meet minimum standards to allow them to receive voucher funds. It is of vital importance that the admissions policies of schools be set in such a way that they do not discriminate, either intentionally or otherwise. For the best results, the Education Voucher Agency should identify in advance admissions policies which would, because of known factors, have a discriminatory effect, and should annually review the admissions policies of the eligible schools to guard against the possibility of invidious discrimination. In addition, admissions policies must deal not only

with the problem of student selection, but also with transfer and dismissal policies.

Because the schools will be funded through government funds, it is reasonable for the Education Voucher Agency to insist that certain minimum requirements are met, such as programs in schools which assure the literacy of all students, and standards of school safety. How extensive these minimum standards are is up to the Education Voucher Agency, as is the task of ascertaining whether or not eligible schools meet the minimum standards.

c) collecting and disseminating information to parents

In order to make informed choices about where to send their children, parents will need two kinds of information. The first kind will tell parents what kinds of general standards the Education Voucher Agency recommends parents take into account in their choice of schools. This is especially important for parents who have never before sent their children to schools other than those provided in the public system, who might otherwise be at a disadvantage in choosing wisely for their children.

The second kind of information would deal with the specific programs offered by the eligible schools. Schools would of course be able to produce their own information, but the Education Voucher Agency also has a responsibility to see that parents can obtain information about schools collected by an impartial agency. The collection of information about different schools could be carried out by the staff of the EVA or could be contracted out to independent information collection agencies. The dissemination of this information should be accompanied by counseling services available to aid parents in their selection.

d) technical assistance

Under a voucher program, the state department of education's role in collecting information and guiding curriculum development in public schools would no longer exist. It would be replaced by the services of the EVA in amassing the same sort of information that would be available to schools if they were to need it. Technical assistance of this sort would also be available to independent groups wishing to establish new schools, as well as assistance which would instruct them on how to meet minimum standards and construct non-discriminatory admissions policies.

e) districting and transporting

In order for all children to have equal opportunities to attend the school their parents have chosen, transportation must be provided. A lack of publicly funded transportation might support de facto segregation by making it more expensive for parents to send children outside the immediate geographic area. How exactly the transportation is to be funded is up to the Education Voucher Agency. It might include in the basic value of the voucher a provision to meet the transportation cost to the chosen school. It might also run its own transportation system, scheduling the routes after school selections have been completed.

Even with transportation provided, limits must still be set as to how far a child may travel to the chosen school. The drawing of "district" lines which enclose an area in which a family may select a school must be drawn in such a way that they do not discriminate against any particular group's ability to attend the schools it chooses.

f) accountability

The Education Voucher Agency must be responsible for two kinds of accountability: "consumer protection" accountability and "minimum standards" accountability.

While part of the accountability function is inherent in the EVA's ability to collect and disseminate information to parents about the eligible schools, the EVA must also be responsible for assuming that the individual schools do not carry on practices which could in any way be interpreted as defrauding the consumer. This includes strict supervision of all school advertising practices to assure the accuracy of all information given to the prospective customers. In addition, the EVA must ascertain whether or not schools are spending more than the determined allowance on advertising, which might give one school an unfair advantage over another.

Accountability to parents also includes assuring that minimum educational and physical standards are met by the eligible schools. It is not enough for the EVA to set those minimum standards and to assume that they will be met; schools must be inspected and evaluated regularly to assure compliance.

The Schools

Under the voucher program, each of the eligible schools is responsible for the determination of its own program over the minimum standards. That program may be an emphasis on science, or the arts, or foreign languages. It may also include different kinds of teaching techniques--individualized instruction, the open classroom, or team teaching. How that program is determined is the affair of each school, and can range from administrative fiat to a jointly determined program with parents, teachers, administrators, and outside consultants. In some cases, parent participation in program development may be part of the school's appeal

Whatever the program developed, each school is responsible for providing the EVA with a complete description of the plan early enough in the Spring so that it may review the plan and be certain that it meets minimum standards. Late in the Spring, parents will be informed of the available options for the following year. Parents will choose schools for their children and schools will make their selections in the early part of the summer.

These are the most basic minimum requirements for the operation of a voucher education system. Only the state or community which decides to enact voucher education can decide the extent and the specifics of the final version.

The Alum Rock Demonstration

The one field test of the regulated-compensatory voucher model took place in Alum Rock, California. The Alum Rock district was impoverished and looking for funds and the Office of Economic Opportunity wanted someone to try the voucher project under the guidelines provided by the Center for the Study of Public Policy. The outcome of negotiations for hosting a pilot voucher system was a $7 million dollar grant from the National Institute of Education (NIE) to the coffers of Alum Rock Union Elementary School District.

The Alum Rock Union Elementary School District served some 10,000 children in a low income section of San Jose, California. The district operated 24 public schools. The population was nearly 55 percent Mexican-American, 10 percent black and 35 percent other ethnic groups. At the time of the voucher demonstration, the annual turnover in population was in the 35 percent range.

For five years (1972-1977), some Alum Rock schools (K-8) tried a modified "regulated-compensatory" voucher system as outlined by the Center for the Study of Public Policy. In terms of the "modifications," Nirenburg (1976:4) notes that:

> ... by assuring teacher and administrator job security and by not including private/parochial schools, (Alum Rock) has merely offered the public a series of mini-schools and invited extensive community feedback about, and participation in, the school system. In effect, then, the only existing voucher program, referred to as a "transition" voucher, does not test two of the most important and controversial points of the entire voucher concept: (1) that free market competition where responsiveness is a function of the financial resources following a student, results in a natural expansion or contraction of educational services as needed, and (2) the promotion of diversity so that all identifiable student/learner needs would be met - either through a "public" or "private" source.

Organization. Each voucher school in the Alum Rock system was required to offer at least two different educational programs (called mini-schools), one of which was a basic education program. The programs were developed by teachers with varying levels of input from the community ranging from no parent input, conducting parent preference surveys, to planning with parents.

All schools submitted a one-page description of their philosophy and methods to the voucher office by March. The descriptions were compiled into a booklet describing the voucher application procedures and one voucher for each child. Parents listed their first, second, and third choices, and then returned the completed vouchers to the district offices. Children were assigned to mini-schools on a first-come, first-serve basis. Parents had the right to choose any mini-school in any voucher school building for their child. Free bussing was provided for all children who attended non-neighborhood schools.

The key to the voucher system was the allocation of funds. Fund allocation was determined by the number of students who were signed up for each mini-school. The mini-school's yearly budget was determined by multiplying the number of students enrolled by the voucher worth of each student. The mini-schools, in order to obtain operating funds, redeemed the vouchers presented by the parents of attending children. The value of the standard voucher was theoretically equal to the district's average per child expenditure. About 69 percent of the students received compensatory vouchers which were worth more than the standard vouchers and were intended to provide educationally disadvantaged students with compensatory learning services. Students receiving funds under other grant forms were given a discounted compensatory voucher.

Mini-school Concept. The programs chosen by parents were organized as mini-schools. In theory, each mini-school was to operate as an autonomous

unit with its own budget, to have freedom to choose its own staff, and to have complete control over its curriculum. During the third year of operation, each of the participating voucher schools in the Alum Rock district housed between two and five distinct education mini-schools. The programs of the mini-schools were designed by teachers who took the initiative, with occasional guidance from parents or the principal, to develop unique or innovative programs. Some mini-schools were oriented toward subject-matter or towards a particular approach to learning. Others were advertised as bilingual or multicultural. Mini-schools varied in size from one classroom to 21 classrooms. The median mini-school size was six classrooms. Many of the smaller schools had no choice but to use multi-graded classrooms.

Selected Findings. The main objective information currently available about Alum Rock results from a questionnaire/interview survey of 600 participating parents in the fall of years one, two, three, and five of the voucher demonstration. The results were detailed by Bridge and Blackman (1977) and Bridge (1978). The Alum Rock households' sample was divided into three groups in order to compare the effects of having choices versus no choices. The study compared two treatment groups, old voucher households which had choices in year one and new voucher households which began having choices in year two. The third, a control group, were non-voucher households who had no choices until year five when the voucher system was supplanted by a district-wide open enrolment system.

Perspectives regarding parent choice were obtained. The level of parent education appeared to be the important explanatory factor regarding the level

of parental awareness of the voucher choice system. The higher the level of education, the higher the level of parental awareness regarding the voucher system. As well, parental information levels changed positively across time in the two voucher groups tested. The control group of non-voucher parents did not improve in information levels over time. This suggests that parents became more informed as time passed. Most parents chose programs (mini-schools) for educationally irrelevant reasons like the geographic location of the programs or the desire to keep siblings or friends together in the same program. For example, in year two, 70 percent of the parents cited geographic location as the primary determinant of program choice. The desire to keep siblings or friends together in the same program was the main reason for choice of program by 31 percent of the parents interviewed. More educated, higher-income parents placed more faith in printed information materials in contrast to low-income, less educated parents who relied more upon talks with parent-counsellors and other face-to-face exchanges. Rasmussen (1976) found that parent choice, in practice, was limited by enrolment ceilings for each mini-school. Once a mini-school was "full," parents seeking entrance for their children were forced into second and third choice situations.

School professionals, according to Rasmussen (1976), felt they had greater control over curriculum, budget, and staffing decisions although this varied widely from school to school. Teachers frequently identified very strongly with their particular mini-school and were loathe to transfer to another if the need arose. Teachers were prepared to cooperate in the voucher experiment to the point where their conditions of employment were not threatened. Generally, teachers viewed the competition among mini-schools as acceptable rather than harmful. A drawback of the Alum Rock voucher system for teachers

was that competitive success of the mini-schools only produced more of the problems teachers struggled with every day. Success brought more bother than benefit. More successful schools did not get teachers with higher salaries, better working conditions, or more flexibility. Because the incentives were not available, teachers began to try to make the mini-schools good, but not too good--good enough to attract enough students, but not so good that too many students would be attracted.

Principals gained more influence from the central office as a result of the decentralization effects of the voucher concept. Principal authority was perceived by teachers to have increased in five schools and to have stayed the same in nine.

Some enrolment fluctuations occurred in mini-schools. There were 22 mini-schools at six voucher schools in year one. Ten of the 22 experienced an enrolment change of ten parents in year two. Losses in some mini-schools were as high as 38 percent of the students between year one and two. Gains ranged up to 60 percent although 10 percent was normal. Variations were more moderate between year two and three.

Perceptions of success regarding the Alum Rock voucher demonstration vary considerably. Some felt that the demonstration could hardly be called a voucher experiment. For example, Rasmussen (1976) claims that the ideal, theoretical conception of a child able to transfer from one school to another at any time, to be admitted elsewhere immediately, and followed by increased revenues to the school did not occur. Schools took action to reduce the vulnerability of the organization and operate efficiently. They countered "accountability" pressures by such things as building cash revenues, and placing limits on acceptance of students and enrolments. Warren (1976) points out that only

public schools were included and both school survival and staff employment rights were guaranteed. Overlan (1975) thought the lack of parochial school involvement at Alum Rock, because of restrictions of the state constitution, seriously compromised the voucher testing. In addition, only the elementary portion of the system operated on the voucher plan. Cohen (1979) claims that all that occurred was a slight modification of school and professional planning as well as resource allocation.

However, Levin (1976), the director of the Alum Rock demonstration, feels that considerations of theoretical and/or methodological purities really beg the question when the changes are taken into account. The changes at Alum Rock in three years of demonstration, according to Levin's subjective views, were:

1. Joint planning and design of the curriculum by classroom teachers.
2. Determination of resource allocations by classroom teachers.
3. Institutionalization of alternative education.
4. Creation of a budgeting system that allows a child's educational dollars--both basic and compensatory--to follow that child.
5. Modification of the principal's role to that of consultant and facilitator.
6. Expansion of programs in response to a high level of parental demand.
7. Phase out of programs because of low demand.
8. Distribution to parents of program evaluation reports, including data on both affective and cognitive growth.
9. Choice by parents and students of the educational style that appears best to them.
10. Involvement of the vast majority of teachers in programs which they design, which are consistent with their philosophy and which they are enthusiastic about.

Warren (1976:15) perceived, as strengths of the project, that:

1. Teachers had smaller classes and were able to spend more time individually with the children.
2. Both the slow learner and the high achiever could receive more personal instruction, and the high achiever could help teach others.
3. Multi-age groups (like the old one-room schools) would aid student growth.
4. Parents, with their children, can exercise their rights as consumers of education by looking at the mini-schools and selecting the one which meets their preferences for style and content.

Conclusion. As Bridge (1978:510) notes:

> ... the Alum Rock demonstration did not fulfill the requirements of a true voucher system, but it did succeed in greatly expanding the choices available to parents. Parents had true choices among approximately equal-cost alternatives, and they had to gather information, choose a mini-school for each of their children, and then evaluate the results.

The demonstration could not be said to prove that the education voucher concept is workable, but neither can it be stated conclusively that the voucher concept is completely unworkable. There are pros and cons to the whole concept.

THE "PROS" AND "CONS" OF EDUCATION VOUCHERS

Perspectives regarding education vouchers are complex and extensive. Depending upon one's particular philosophical orientation, vouchers may be perceived as advantageous or disadvantageous for education. Within this milieu of shades of meaning and perspective, the possibility of outlining comprehensively the various arguments for and against education vouchers becomes remote. Therefore, the following section of this paper only attempts to identify the more commonly stated arguments that surface in the literature of education vouchers.

The "Pros"

The arguments favoring the use of education vouchers deal with social equality, economic equality, healthy competition, service accountability to parents as clients, human enthusiasm and commitment, shared values, and reduction of financial pressures on sectarian and private schools.

Social equality. Levin (1968:36), in summarizing his view of the possible positive effects of the free market approach, notes that:

> ... some parents would have greater choices among schools and some schools would have to be productive in order to survive in the competitive framework. The increase in consumer choice and the resultant competition among schools would be likely to lead to greater educational benefits for many students and their families (private benefits) than those which they receive under the present monopolistic system.

Education vouchers would grant to the tax paying public the individual choice of where educational services could be obtained as is customarily done with the service delivery of most social, health and medical benefits.

Economic equality. Because income and property levels vary greatly, local taxing authorities cannot provide equal access to schooling opportunity or quality of education. Poor districts tax their constituents at higher rates for less dollar returns on lower assessment levels on income and property than wealthy districts do. The use of vouchers would permit all households to obtain the same amount per child and thus equalize economic opportunity.

Healthy competition. Educational vouchers would give all households with children their own choice of schooling among neighboring public, parochial, and private schools. Given parental choice of schooling, public schools would compete to attract and retain clients. If second and third systems of schooling sprang from the parochial and private sector, then improved education and leveling of costs would occur over time between public, parochial, and private schools as they compete to attract and hold clientele.

Service accountability to parents as clients. Education vouchers would give parents the choice of which schools their children would attend. If a school did not deliver what was privately or socially beneficial to their children, then the parents could transfer their child and his education voucher to a school that would. When a school lost enough tax credits, it would either improve delivery or be out of business.

Human enthusiasm and commitment. Teachers who become key program developers in a voucher system feel that the programs they have designed are "theirs" and thus have a vested interest and professional pride in making the programs

successful. Parents and students may feel more involved in education by assuming a greater decision-making role in the choice of school and program. Parents develop a sense of power in the education of their children which may not appear to exist to the same extent in the current education system. In essence, power and decision-making in education would become more decentralized and less bureaucraticized.

Shared Values. Particularly in large urban centers, the development of unique schools to attend to shared values such as music, science, physical education and so forth becomes feasible.

Reduction of financial pressures on sectarian and private schools. If the voucher covers the full cost of education, non-public schools will not be forced to rely on financial support from religious organizations or affluent parents.

The "Cons"

The arguments against the use of educational vouchers deal with social inequality, religion and public education, inappropriateness of the market analogy, economics, resistance of the public school establishment, destruction of the public school system, exchange of bureaucracies, administrative problems, and lack of parent decision-making capability.

Social inequality. In summarizing his view of the possible negative effects of the free market approach Levin (1968:36) notes that:

> ... the schools are ... expected to fulfill certain social functions. It is in these that a market approach to schooling is likely to yield poor results. For example, basic schooling represents the primary device for equalizing opportunities among racial and social groups.

> Yet, advantaged children would probably receive far better schooling under the market proposal than would disadvantaged ones, and it is likely that this disparity would lead to larger future inequalities in opportunity between the children of the middle class and those of the poor. Further, it is not clear that a set of largely autonomous schools could provide the common set of values and knowledge necessary for the functioning of a democratic society. Finally, it is likely that the market proposal would increase racial and social stratification of students among schools. Whatever the success of the market in meeting consumer preferences, it would be offset by the market's failure to satisfy the social goals of basic schooling. (underlining inserted)

Secondly, voucher education could be used to set up a system of "private" schools supported by public funds.

Thirdly, the admissions policy of a voucher school, while not intentionally discriminatory, might have a discriminatory effect. Elitism could result from the use of special criteria such as income, academic ability, or religion as an admission requirement to selected schools. What neither the review of the admissions policies nor the careful planning of district and transportation lines could prevent, however, would be voluntary segregation. To tell parents that they cannot send their child to one school or that they must send them to another goes against the very concept of voucher education. Not doing so might very well mean the acceptance of elitism or social inequality.

Religion and public education. Conclusions about the viability of a voucher system that would include sectarian schools vary. Eliminating sectarian schools (or private schools for that matter) from a voucher program would leave the present public school "monopoly" essentially unchallenged.

Inappropriateness of the market analogy. Warren (1974:20-25) states that:

> ... If there is to be competition with the present public system from other schools, especially from independently initiated schools, new schools must have an equal chance in the competition. Otherwise, the freedom to establish alternative schools may be a little more than rhetoric. In an open market, small new businesses are at a distinct

disadvantage when they seek to compete with large, well-established businesses that already possess not only the labor, but also the facilities and the experiential knowledge new businesses often lack. New schools would probably suffer the same way unless given some kind of additional start-up aid.

What kind of educational reforms can be expected from subjecting school to market pressures? Here we must again look to experience in the market. While it is no doubt true that in certain cases industrial research tries to find the ideal method of solving consumers' problems, it is also true that industries spend a good deal of their efforts trying to make products marginally different from those of their competitors -- trying to make a product more attractive to the consumer at the minimum cost to the producer. How does this process of marginal reform, likely to be brought about by voucher education, compare with the present emphasis in educational research on finding the ideal solution to educational problems? While education is an area in which one hesitates to be satisfied with marginal reforms, the search for ideal reforms has been unproductive, for a variety of reasons. Marginal reforms may be preferable to the few or no reforms brought by existing methods.

If industrial research is aimed at the improvement of the product, market research is aimed at what people will buy and why. Market competition has raised advertising from the level of crude propoganda to sophisticated psychological manipulation of the prospective customer.

... Just how much do schools resemble businesses? While the technology necessary to produce hi-fi parts (is) quite clear, ... education is burdened with a "fuzzy" technology. It is difficult ... to know what combination of factors add up to learning in any given child. If a child is not learning, does that mean that the "teaching machine" is malfunctioning? Which teaching machine -- the teacher or the school? Which teacher? And how does one "repair" a teacher's performance? Can one treat teachers like parts of a machine? What if any variety of social, political, or economic factors are involved--how can a voucher school be held responsible for problems outside the classroom?

Private schools are often raised as examples of schools which must respond to market pressure in order to survive--and many do survive, and many do provide students with the education their parents desire. This may be less a result of market competition, however, than of other aspects of the private schools as they now exist. Many select students using an entrance examination, assuring themselves an elite student body that is almost assured to succeed. Most have classes half the size of those in public schools, affording students at least twice the amount of teachers' attentions. And in some cases, although fewer than one might expect, parents who pay directly for the education of their children (in addition to supporting public schools through their taxes) are concerned about the progress of their child enough to take an active role in the process. This parental concern exists, however, in the public school population, although it may be more difficult for a family where both parents must work to manifest that concern than for a family with more leisure time available. While vouchers should make the parent feel more directly involved in the education of the child, the same limitations on the parent's ability to act on this concern will remain.

Economics. A voucher system is likely to be more expensive than the present system. It would include the additional cost of children now attending private and some sectarian schools whose parents now pay that expense from their own pockets. It would include the cost of transportation sufficient to assure that no child would be unable to attend the school of his parents' choice because of lack of transportation. It also would include the cost of the massive regulatory and administrative apparatus of the Education Voucher Agency, without which the entire system may be untenable. With school taxes already an area in which the taxpayer has demonstrated little enthusiasm about higher rates, a very strong argument for voucher education would have to be developed to convince taxpayers to shoulder an even greater tax burden.

Secondly, no one yet has figured out how to collect and allocate the voucher funds fairly and efficiently.

Resistance of the public school establishment. The public school establishment has a vested interest in maintaining the public system as it now exists. However, much more important is the total lack of job security for school personnel under a voucher system. There are many questions which professional educators would want answered. Would all educators now in unions, continue to be unions? Would there be one blanket contract of the same areas now covered or a separate contract for each individual educational enterprise or school building? Or should there be a blanket contract for a province as a whole? How would job security be dealt with? Would a teacher obtain tenure only within a narrow bargaining unit? If a school "went out of business," would the teacher simply be out of a job or guaranteed another job by the province or district? If a school had a teacher whom school management considered ineffective, could the teacher be terminated? If not, how could the school

control its own destiny? Would all teachers receive the same salary for similar education and experience or would each bargaining unit negotiate its own wages and benefits? Could that result in a concentration of the best talent in a few schools? Who would share in the profits of a school? And how, indeed, are schools to make decisions about who or what is to blame if the school does not succeed in the market?

It is not hard to understand why teachers and administrators may be opposed to voucher education. They would be a powerful force of potential opposition that voucher advocates would have to overcome if voucher education were to be adopted.

Destruction of the public school system. In an unregulated voucher system, the possibility exists that low-income children could only get into the less expensive schools. As well, many schools might be tempted to restrict admission to the brightest youngsters, leaving the more difficult children to someone else. The gap between rich and poor, between bright and non-so-bright would be widened. The "equa zing" effect of public education could be lost.

Exchange of bureaucracies. If the "market" were to be regulated to safeguard consumers, the regulatory Education Voucher Agency (EVA) soon could develop a regulatory system as complex and detailed as that now governing public schools. A "new" bureaucracy would evolve to replace the "old."

Administrative problems. A regulated voucher system would require considerable regulation to assure that unauthorized "add-on" sums to the value of the voucher did not occur; that uninformed parents were not taken advantage of by "slick" operators; that any open admissions rules were honored; that eligibility rules for pupils, parents and schools were clearly stated; that the requisitioning and allocation of funds was conducted expeditiously and

fairly; that the needs of "disadvantaged" groups were protected; that the massive busing required to allow free access to the total marketplace was in place and easily accessible; that curriculum content was monitored to ensure that any basic standards were met; that "profits" of the schools were not excessive or to the detriment of students; and so forth.

Other practical questions are raised by Fowler (1980):

1. Who would issue the voucher?
2. Would there be only one denomination of voucher?
3. Would the governance of schools change markedly?
4. How would the role of a board member change?
5. How would the role of the superintendent change?
6. What about vouchers being applied at independent and parochial schools?
7. Would a voucher plan make a difference in educational quality or social equity?
8. Why would a voucher plan appeal to ... legislators?

In general, a number of potential dysfunctions in implementing vouchers become evident:

1. Rules - there may be too many or too few. Those which exist may not be clear enough.
2. Dissemination - the rules may not be effectively disseminated.
3. Monitoring - the efforts to monitor compliance with the rules could easily become inconsistent and/or uncoordinated.
4. Enforcement - the system of sanctions against recalcitrant operations may not be sufficient.

Lack of parent decision-making capability. Disadvantaged clients may be least informed about matters of schooling with the result that more advantaged clients will have a considerably greater impact on schooling policies unless extraordinary efforts are made to involve a wider spectrum of the community in the decision-making process.

A Summative View

If a voucher system were to be attempted, a number of key philosophical and practical questions would have to be addressed. In philosophical terms, to use Goodlad's (1979) phrase, "what are schools for?" What are the values and assumptions fundamental to our school system? If schools are intended to provide some social benefits rather than provide primarily individual benefit, the voucher system may not be desirable. And in practical terms, do we get anything better than we already have by using the voucher system? Could we implement the concept with a major degree of efficiency? There has been no sufficient test of the concept to tell us whether we do or not. The current debate regarding the voucher system does not appear to provide any conclusive answer to either question.

IMPLICATIONS OF EDUCATION VOUCHERS

An Unregulated Voucher System

If an unregulated education voucher system were to be implemented, what would the implications be for governance, funding and delivery of education?

Governance. The locus of control for controlling education would be placed in the hands of parents. Parents would vote with their vouchers as to which educational programs they most wanted. The government and its bureaucracy would become a financial management agency. The idea of a board of trustees, acting as policy makers and deciders in the interest of parents, might no longer be necessary. Parents would decide directly, for themselves,

with their voucher votes. As well, senior administrative staff would likely be less involved in general district planning since most of the program planning functions would occur more directly in each school and be undertaken by teachers and principals. The latter two groups would have significantly increased educational responsibilities as to what should be taught i.e. what sells (in market terms). The children, whom all of this effects, would likely have little direct impact on the governance of education.

In essence, the current system of governance would be revised. Increased control of program would be placed within each school and the test of the desirability of school programs would be in the hands of the buying public, the parents -- not in the hands of the government or school board trustees.

Funding. The means of assessing and collecting dollars for education might or might not change. The means of distribution definitely would change. The education voucher concept is basically a system of redistributing buying power for education into parental hands.

Delivery of Education. The schools would become the focal point of education delivery. As such, the principals and teaching staff would become key actors in educational delivery. These personnel would become responsible for planning, preparing, and delivering a marketable program for customers. Planning on an extended system basis might disappear in favor of year to year plans to respond to current market trends. The government would have no say regarding the content of education in an unregulated education voucher system. Each school might operate largely independently or possibly as a member of a consortium of schools. School boards would operate more in the capacity of a

board of directors of a corporation, either for a consortium or for an individual school. Their major concerns likely would become the survival of the school and, possibly, profits. Educational programs would become a means to corporate ends (survival and profit) with the education of children becoming a byproduct, although an important one, of the market process.

There would likely be an increase in market "hoopla" for each school or consortium. Each education voucher system virtually would require a marketing expert to "sell" the school. A principal conceivably would become largely a business manager first and educator second.

As outlined in the discussion on the "pros" and "cons" of education vouchers, proponents of the concept would visualize healthy competition; service accountability to clients; the stimulation of the enthusiasm and commitment of teachers, parents, and students to education; equality of access to clients of the private benefits of education; and opportunities to develop "specialist" schools. Those persons opposed to the system of voucher education described above would argue that the foregoing picture leads to social inequalities and elitism; to the destruction of public education; and to the chaos of the marketplace. They might further argue that parents may not be able to make the best possible choices for children in terms of the social benefits of education to the nation. In general, the education system would become turbulent, ruled by market forces and aimed primarily at private benefits and enterprise.

A Regulated Education Voucher System

A regulated voucher system would place some limits on the operations of the concept of vouchers. The regulations could be extensive or limited and likely would evolve from extensive negotiations among stakeholders.

Governance. The government might attempt to retain control of portions of the curriculum as "basic" or "required" curricular elements. The main argument for such elements likely would be that some basic social benefits of education are essential to national survival. In order to regulate the standard, basic requirements, the government would require a support and monitoring bureaucracy to ensure that the basic requirements of the curriculum were met. Other extant education governance mechanisms such as school boards might continue though with decreased roles and influence. Parents would still have significant control by their voucher vote as to the type of school/program desired beyond the basic requirements.

Further regulations by government might be required to ensure educational equality of opportunity and value for all children. Once again, government would need support and monitoring capabilities to sustain these requirements.

School personnel would still have a major role in shaping the school program, particularly the non-basic portion of the program. Essentially it is the non-basic program which would "sell" a particular school since the basics program would be similar in each school.

In essence, elements of the existing governance system would be retained although the roles would be modified and reduced. Increased control of some portions of school program would be placed within each school and the test of that program would be the buying public's voucher vote.

Funding. As with an unregulated voucher system, the means of distribution of funds would change since the education voucher concept is basically a system of redistribution into parental hands of fiscal power for education. Some specific limits on how the money could be spent could be or might be imposed by government or other regulating agencies.

Delivery of Education. The delivery of education in a regulated system likely would be largely similar to that in an unregulated system.

In general, proponents of the voucher concept would view a regulated voucher system as providing some though not enough competitive and market freedom; a degree of accountability to parents; some opportunities for teachers, parents, and students to become more actively involved in shaping education; and an opportunity to develop some schools based on shared values or unique interests.

Opponents of a voucher system, even a regulated system, likely would still view the concept as elitist; destructive of the concept of public education; more expensive; based on an inappropriate, market philosophy; contributing to increased governmental bureaucracy; and creating social turbulence.

A Conclusion

Any intent to implement either an unregulated or regulated voucher system must be prepared to face severe tests from competing coalitions of interest. Any massive implementation effort is likely to cause significant interruptions in the education process for a period of up to one or two decades. A more limited, incremental implementation effort, limited to specific jurisdictions may permit the concept to be tested more fully until the full implications of the concept are better known. At present, the full implications of education vouchers are not known since the one test of education vouchers was very limited and produced no reliable, generalizable results.

ALTERNATIVES TO VOUCHER EDUCATION

In General

Harold and June Shane, as noted by Miller (1981:20), claim that in the future we will need to create an educational program that carries us:

From	To
Mass teaching	Personalized teaching
Single learnings	Multiple learnings
Passive answering-absorbing	Active answer-seeking
Rigid daily programs	Flexible schedules
Training in formal skills and knowledge	Building desirable attitudes and appreciations that stimulate a questing for knowledge
Teacher initiative and direction	Child initiative and group planning
Isolated content	Interrelated content
Memorized answers	Problem awareness
Emphasis on textbooks	Use of media in addition to texts
Passive mastery of information	Active stimulation of intellect

If these perceptions of the future are correct, the program of the Third Wave school is likely to be characterized by participation, personalization, and flexibility.

Can the education voucher idea accommodate these characteristics? Possibly. But other ideas also may be able to accomplish the same thing. Some of these ideas include:

1. fully funded "private" or "alternative" schools run by parent groups or lay/professional cooperatives and developed initially under an Experimental Schools Program;
2. modified funding (financing) formulas;
3. improved alternative education delivery formats such as technologically advanced correspondence schools, home study, tutorials, or similar "out-of-school" education formats; colloquiums, contract learning, and/or packaged learning modules;

4. revised credit granting structures to provide schooling credit for work experience programs undergone either prior to or during school programs;
5. alternative organizational arrangements for education which could include an idea such as the "school without walls" concept.

All of these ideas are extant and require only some encouragement to develop into more active states.

In Alberta

A number of activities in Alberta may be viewed as precursors to the ends which education vouchers are to serve. The major purpose of education vouchers is to place increased power and control of education of children into the hands of parents without restricting any child from obtaining a quality educational program. Some of the activities occurring in Alberta which permit and encourage "grassroots" involvement in education are:

1. decentralized budgetting, which is a system of school-centered planning and decision-making;
2. a system of school grants for program purposes, such as the Elementary Opportunity Fund;
3. funding of private schools;
4. open enrolment policies in many school jurisdictions;
5. correspondence school and home tutorial programs; and
6. parental involvement programs such as Education North, the School Lunch program, Community Education and Early Childhood Services.

These examples should suffice to indicate that the rudiments of a system exist which, if amplified, possibly could accomplish the same or similar purpose as a dramatic shift to a voucher concept.

CONCLUSION

The education voucher concept challenges the fundamental premises of our school system. Discussion of the concept compels people to ask the following kinds of questions:

- what are schools for?
- what are the legitimate functions of parents and the government in education?
- should the voucher concept be implemented in education?
- are there alternatives which could provide similar benefits?
- should change in education be evolutionary or revolutionary?

These and a host of other questions beg for answers before any conclusion can be made as to whether or not to proceed with any operationalized attempts at education vouchers.

Operationalizing the education voucher system poses its own staggering problems. The available knowledge regarding how to implement such a concept is very limited since there has been no reliable test of the concept anywhere.

Lastly, there may be alternative means of accomplishing the same things that education vouchers might accomplish. The questions we must ask of ourselves are "what do we wish to do in education?" and "can education vouchers or other alternative concepts accomplish the ends we desire?"

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